

1. What are the functions of the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) in India? Has its role undergone a transformation in the recent years? Critically assess.

Approach

Make a general introduction about Prime Minister’s Office in introduction and contextualise to present times. In next part in brief mention functions of PMO with help of examples. Further mention the need of powerful PMO in the present times and the negative trends which has cropped up. In conclusion create a balance between need for powerful PMO but its limit should be within the democratic polity.

Introduction:

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) consists of the immediate staff of the Prime Minister of India, as well as multiple levels of support staff reporting to the Prime Minister. The PMO is headed by the Principal Secretary, currently Pramod Kumar Misra. The PMO was originally called the Prime Minister's Secretariat until 1977, when it was renamed during the Morarji Desai ministry.

Body

Functions of Prime Minister’s Office (PMO)

- To provide secretarial assistance to PM and act as a think tank.
- It deals with all references which under the Rules of Business comes to PM.
- Helps the PM in discharge of his overall responsibilities as CEO and as head of NITI Aayog.
- PM’s relief fund and PM’s National Defence Fund are managed by PM, which are based on voluntary contribution.
- To deal with public relation side of PM, which is related to intellectual forums and Civil Societies.
- Acts as an office to get feedback of administration by considering public grievances against malfunctioning of administrative system.
- To provide Prime Ministerial assistance in examination of cases submitted to him for orders under described rules so it acts as settlement house to finalize decision concerning to administrative doubts.
- Specialists: Certain function needs specialists and also needs to be done away from public eyes for greater good. Ex: Pokhran-II, External intelligence etc.

Transformation or Evolution of PMO

- The PMO came into existence in 1947 by replacing the Secretary to the Governor-General (Personal). Till June 1977, it was called as the Prime Minister’s Secretariat (PMS). The evolution of PMO has a distinct stamp of incumbent prime ministers:

- During Nehru's period, secretariat was a low key affair manned by officer of the rank of joint secretary. Cabinet secretariat was the apex body in that era.
- Lal Bahadur shastri enlarged the role. And first time the body become to be known as prime ministers secretariat, manned by senior IAS officer of country. Still, the decision making power was comparatively lesser than cabinet secretariat
- The post of Principal Secretary to Prime Minister was created during the tenure of Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister.
- In 1977 Prime Minister Morarji Desai renamed the Prime Minister's Secretariat as the Prime Minister's Office. He also circumscribed its roles and functions significantly.
- In Rajiv Gandhi era it expanded qualitatively and quantitatively. It took keen interest in technology and in the field of science.
- Subsequently during the tenure of Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao between 1991 and 1996, the Prime Minister's Office played a crucial role in reshaping economic policies in response to the balance of payments crisis of 1991.
- During the period of Vajpayee It was by any reckoning an active PMO in the triple area of economy, foreign policy and security framework.
- After a subdued tenure under last PM Manmohan Singh, it has again gained its vigour under the incumbent prime minister Narendra Modi.

Now PMO has become a necessity in last two decades due to:-

- Governance has increased in its complexity and scope. The faster emerging trends such as the recent ongoing pandemic needs a faster and coordinated response from the top.
- The international situation is more complicated. The emerging trade wars and global turmoil such as financial crises, the rising terrorist activities, the frictions with China and recent rise of Taliban in such short span makes an advisory and policy directive body necessary.
- PMO is the nerve centre of power. This office is the mirror to the incumbent's character, personality and style of functioning. Like in current government, PMO is more powerful due to influence of PM over political party internally, full majority in the lower house and dominating personality characteristics.

Emerging Negative Trend in the Working of PMO

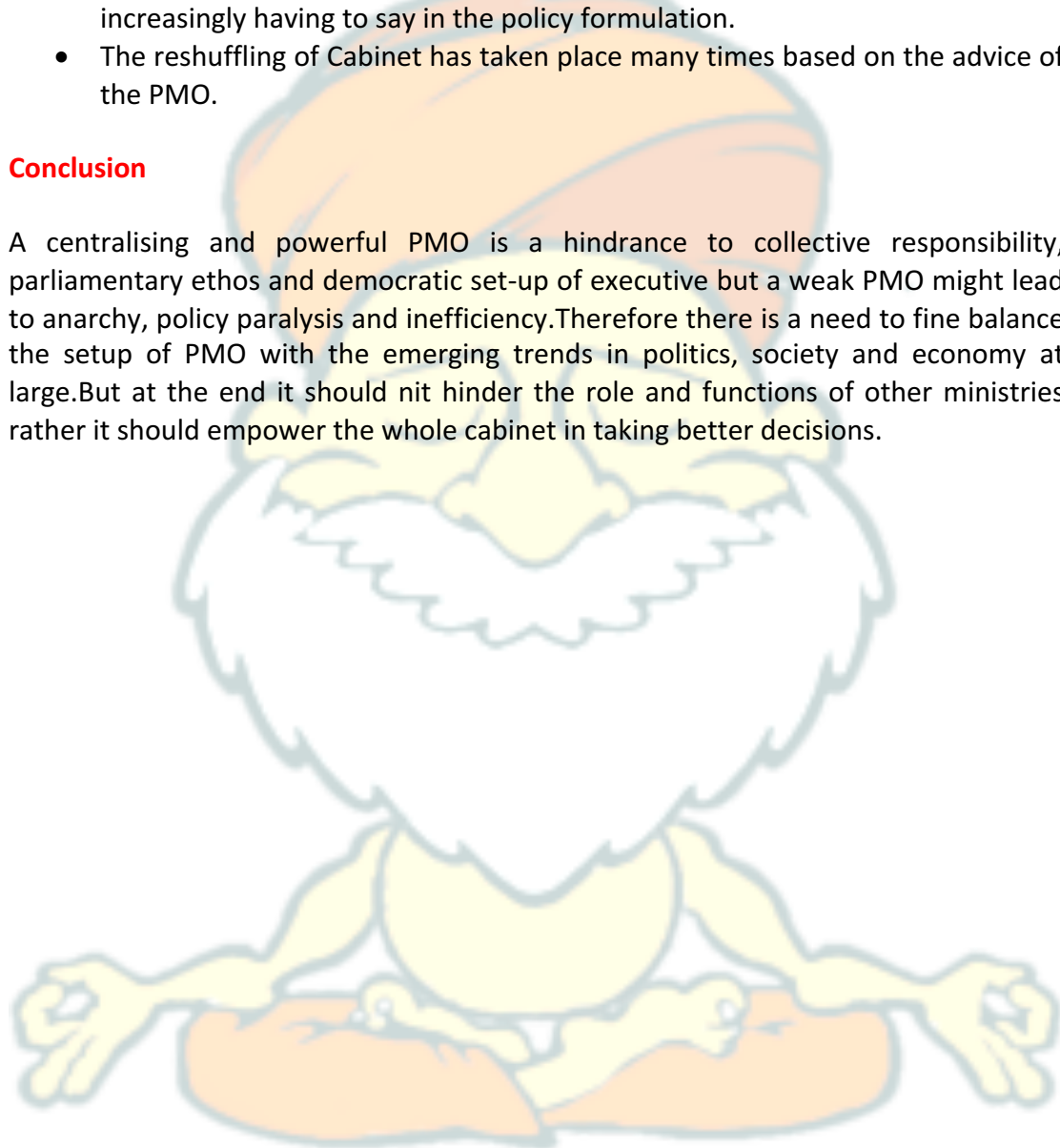
- It is being said that PMO has become an over-grown, over-arching, all-powerful organisation, which is a grave threat to the Parliamentary democracy and hence subverts the Constitution. These allegations have been because of the following factors:
- Most Prime Ministers have regarded the PMO as a parallel government.
- Whichever party in power and whosoever has filled the post of the Prime Minister, it has been observed that there has been a growing tendency towards centralisation in decision-making. Not only does a Prime Minister

sometimes keep with himself an unduly large number of portfolios but also informally exerts his real influence beyond those formally held portfolios. Thus it intrudes into the domain of individual Ministries.

- If the Prime Minister is politically unchallenged in his party, his control over other Ministries and departments, through the mechanism of monitoring, becomes very high.
- Instead of remaining within its envisaged role of providing secretarial assistance to the Prime Minister in the discharge of his functions, the PMO is increasingly having to say in the policy formulation.
- The reshuffling of Cabinet has taken place many times based on the advice of the PMO.

Conclusion

A centralising and powerful PMO is a hindrance to collective responsibility, parliamentary ethos and democratic set-up of executive but a weak PMO might lead to anarchy, policy paralysis and inefficiency. Therefore there is a need to fine balance the setup of PMO with the emerging trends in politics, society and economy at large. But at the end it should not hinder the role and functions of other ministries rather it should empower the whole cabinet in taking better decisions.



2. What are the various constitutional and statutory bodies constituted to address corruption in public life? How effective have these bodies been? Examine.

Approach

Define corruption and link it to different dimensions in Introduction. In next part mention various constitutional and statutory bodies to deal with corruption. In next part mention its effectiveness and then at last add pointers on what measures can be taken to reduce the corruption in ideal sense and also substantiate with measures taken by government in that regard. Make a summary based and reform oriented conclusion for this answer.

Introduction

Corruption is a form of dishonest or unethical conduct by a person entrusted with a position of authority, often to acquire personal benefit. Corruption has its own effect on its societies which undermines democracy, Rule of law and violates human rights and allows organised crime, terrorism and threats to human security. Even national progress is seriously hampered due to corruption.

Body:

Various bodies constituted for fighting corruption:

Statutory Bodies:

- **Central Vigilance Commission:** Apex vigilance institution, free of control from any executive authority, monitoring all vigilance activity under the Central Government and advising various authorities in Central Government organisations in planning, executing, reviewing and reforming their vigilance work. It is empowered to inquire into offences alleged to have been committed under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 by certain categories of public servants. Its annual report gives the details of the work done by the commission and points to systemic failures which lead to corruption in government departments..
- **Lokpal and Lokayukta:** They perform the function of an “ombudsman” and inquire into allegations of corruption against certain public functionaries and for related matters. Lokpal has powers of confiscation of assets, proceeds, receipts and benefits arisen or procured by means of corruption in special circumstances and power to recommend transfer or suspension of public servant connected with allegation of corruption.
- **Central Information Commission:** It plays important role in maintaining transparency in system of governance essential for healthy democracy. Such kind of transparency check aims to curb corruption, nepotism, oppression and misuse or abuse of the authority.

Constitutional bodies:

- CAG: Comptroller and Auditor General is supreme constitutional audit authority of India. Comptroller and Auditor General is the 'watchdog' on each and every financial transaction of Central or State department such as railway, telecom, public sector, organisations etc.
- Election Commission: Supreme authority to conduct free and fair elections, prevent corrupt practices and infiltration of corruption into the representative foundation of India.
- Supreme Court: The Supreme Court of India is the highest judicial court and the final court of appeal under the Constitution of India, with the power of judicial review and ensure just law prevails.

Effectiveness of the bodies in preventing corruption:

- Legal measures taken: Prevention of Corruption Act, the Comptroller and Auditor General, the Judges (Inquiry) Act, the Lok Pal and Lok Ayukta Act 2013, Whistle Blowers Protection Act 2011, Prevention of Money /Laundering Act, Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act and most importantly the Right to Information Act. The Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act, 1988 was amended to empower the Income Tax authorities to attach and confiscate Benami properties. Besides, if a person is found guilty of offence of Benami transaction by the competent court, he shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment and shall also be liable to fine. Several Benami transactions have been identified since the coming into effect of the amended law.
- Election reforms: Cash donations-Recent amendments have reduced the limit on the cash donation to 2000 from the earlier 20000, thus restricting the inflow of anonymous black money into the funds of political parties. Disclosure norms-As earlier mandated by SC, politicians are required to make disclosure about their financial assets, education and criminal records thus helping the voters to make an informed choice and helping clean the politics of criminals
- The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) saw a dramatic drop in the total number of complaints received by it in 2017, keeping in line with the drop in actions by various government departments in cracking down on corruption.
- Many CAG reports were instrumental in unearthing major scams like 2G and coal mines.

Various commissions such as Second Administrative Reforms Commission (SARC) and Santhanam committee have made important and feasible recommendation to strengthen anti-corruption establishment.

- Introduce state-funding as part of election reforms: The high cost of elections and candidates' dependence on money, often of questionable provenance, compromises them from the very outset. Once beholden to moneybags, they are under obligation to return the favour if they win.

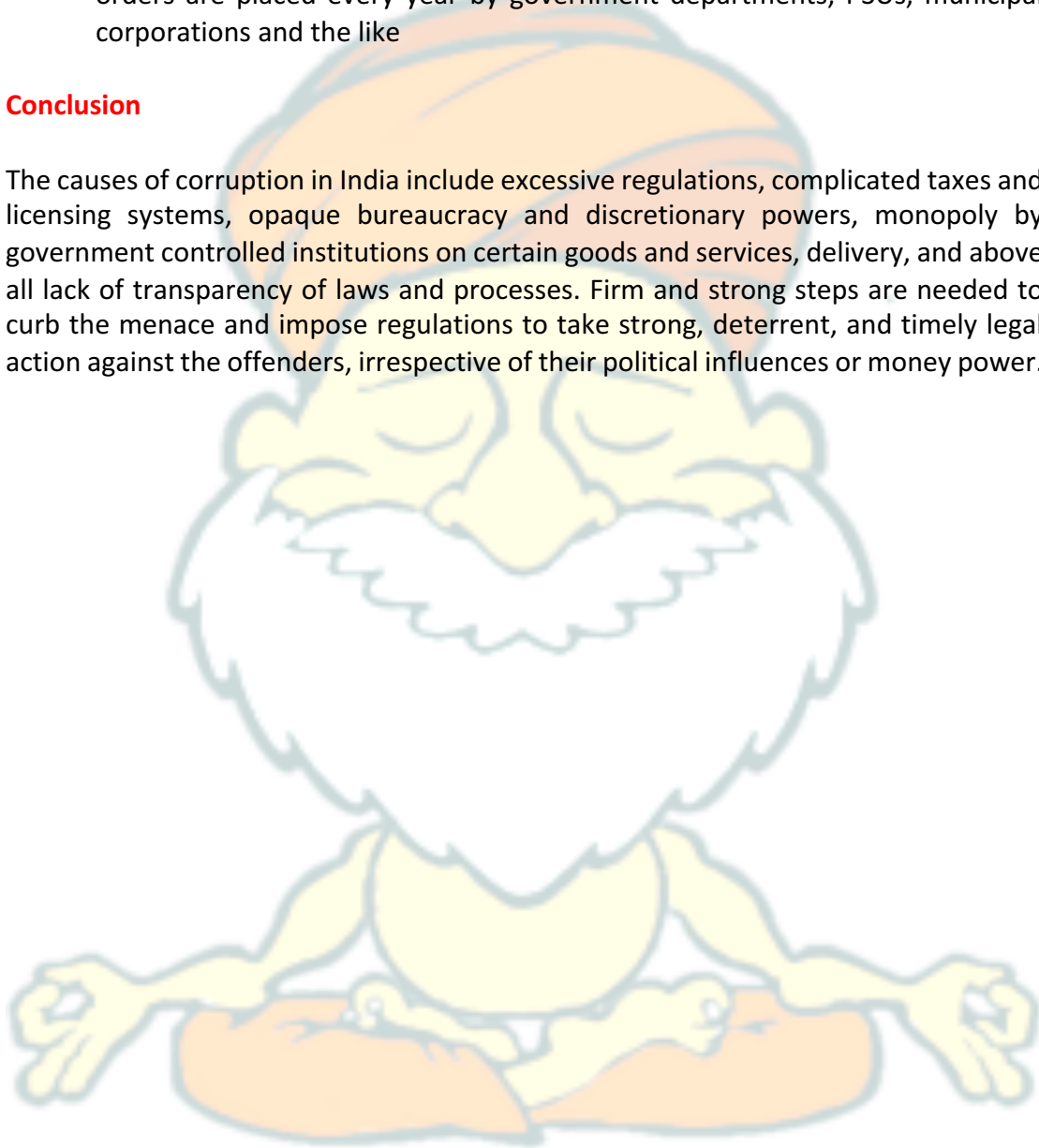
- A reasonable and transparent tax structure, backed by clean and clear enforcement: Our direct taxes (personal income and corporate) are no longer unreasonable, so there's little excuse for trying to evade them. But there is an unhealthy trend in piling on surcharges on various pretexts. Also, there are tons of other taxes that can add up to quite a bit. Finally, there's the larger question of how efficiently and honestly taxpayers' money is put to use — when you see the state of government hospitals and schools, and rotten roads, you wonder where the money you paid as tax has gone
- Liberal and contemporary laws that citizens can understand and respect: People find it difficult to accept ridiculous, outdated and moralistic laws — worse, they may not even be aware of some of these laws till some law enforcer somewhere decides to use them to harass and to extract money. Therefore, to the extent possible, there's a need to cut back on the multiplicity of unnecessary and complex laws, and zero in on just the ones that are needed to ensure a fair, equitable and just system. These should then be administered without fear or favour.
- Reduce the role of the state in people's lives to the absolutely essential: In some ways, this is related to our earlier point. The greater the scope for state interference — be it the police or the clerk in a government office or the customs inspector — the greater the scope for harassment and graft.
- Genuine autonomy for the public/government sector: Big PSUs — think Air India, for instance — place huge contracts. Even a fraction of that is huge money in absolute terms. There is always a temptation for political bosses to exert their influence and swing the contract for chosen ones and receive handsome kickbacks. So get them out of the day-to-day functioning of these PSUs.
- Minimise discretionary powers of ministers and bureaucrats: This would reduce scope for misuse of such powers to favour some --- especially in lucrative areas such as award of government land. Where discretionary powers are unavoidable, bring in checks and balance. After a deal is done, the relevant documents should be put up on the Net.
- Pay government and PSU officers, judges and policemen market-indexed salaries commensurate with their responsibility: This would minimise the 'need' for bribes. Their salaries could be benchmarked against corporate sector salaries. But higher salaries should be combined with exemplary punishment, including dismissal from service and a police case if an employee is caught indulging in corrupt practices. Mere transfer or suspension won't do.
- Introduce sweeping police reforms and stronger judicial accountability: This has been discussed for decades but there's been no action. The recommendations for reforms are already there. Set a time frame for implementation. This will make the police not just a professional force that's not at the beck and call of politicians, but also a trained one with in-built checks against developing vested interests.
- Blacklist corrupt businessmen: Private businesses caught indulging in corrupt practices or bribing officials should be blacklisted for, say, 10 years and be barred from government projects. In the category of corrupt practices would

fall use of shoddy material -- like road contractors who give one inch of tar when they are supposed to give four inches and the road crumbles after one monsoon. Bigger instances of private businesses cutting corners in public projects by colluding with corrupt officials should attract exemplary punishment.

- Transparency and stricter scrutiny of government tenders/orders, including auction/sale of public-owned assets: Hundreds of thousands of crores of orders are placed every year by government departments, PSUs, municipal corporations and the like

Conclusion

The causes of corruption in India include excessive regulations, complicated taxes and licensing systems, opaque bureaucracy and discretionary powers, monopoly by government controlled institutions on certain goods and services, delivery, and above all lack of transparency of laws and processes. Firm and strong steps are needed to curb the menace and impose regulations to take strong, deterrent, and timely legal action against the offenders, irrespective of their political influences or money power.



3. The events transpiring in Afghanistan will have far reaching implications for the Indian subcontinent. Elucidate.

Approach

Make an introduction with the recent rise of Taliban and the past incidents of destabilisation in the Indian subcontinent. In next part mention what are various issues which might arise in the region. In last part mention in short what should be the strategy from here onward for subcontinent. In conclusion take a pragmatic stand and a future course of action.

Introduction

Indian subcontinent has been relatively stable ever since the subsidence of Taliban in early 2000. There have been intermittent security threats and radicalisation but these were thwarted effectively as seen in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India and Myanmar. But the withdrawal of American forces and swift advances made by Taliban might prove to be detrimental for the subcontinent in long run given the nexus between Pakistan and Taliban and its past support for radicalisation and terrorism in India, Bangladesh, Maldives and Myanmar.

Body

Challenges For Indian Subcontinent

- Issue of security : The restoration of Taliban rule in Afghanistan presents some very serious potential challenges for Indian security.
 - The challenges range from securing its development infrastructures to safely evacuating Indians stranded in troubled Afghanistan.
 - Further India didn't have to worry about the threats from its eastern and southern neighbourhood for a longtime. This could change drastically given the past linkages between Taliban and radical groups of Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Myanmar.
 - Further this poses a security risk to even these democratic countries which have remained calm in past.
- Spread of International Terrorism: For Indian Subcontinent, a bigger challenge will be about the Taliban's renewed support for international terrorism and Pakistan's re-direction of jihadi groups that have allegedly fought with the Taliban towards India, Bangladesh, Maldives and Myanmar.
 - The Bangladesh has been curbing Islamic fundamentalism from 2010 with executions of Jamat e Islami leaders. This has created an opposition to Awami government. This atmosphere can be further destabilised by Taliban with active support and ammunition as done in the past. The organisations like Tawheed Khalifa, AQIS, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami

(HuJI-B), and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) can be revived again.

- Srilanka after the war has seen various radicalised groups. The violence between the majority and Muslim has increased and that's being made worse by the recent bombing at chruces and crackdown of government against the fundamentalist. This provides fertile ground for Taliban to export ideology and materials to the region.
- Myanmar may face the similar issues due to the past linkages of Taliban and the Rohingya organisations. Further the recent crackdown and mass exodus of Rohingyas may destabilise not only Myanmar but the whole subcontinent.
- Maldives has been a highest per capita contributor to the terrorist recruitment in past when ISIS was at its peak. This situation where the polity is already destabilised with fundamentalist opposing the government.
- **Religious Fundamentalism:** Like all radical groups, the Taliban will have trouble balancing its religious ideology with the imperatives of state interests. This poses threat to whole region as there are fertile grounds for radicalisation. With active support from Taliban as done in past the situation can worsen especially in India and Bangladesh.
- **New Regional Geopolitical Developments:** There can be new regional geopolitical alignments (such as China-Pakistan-Taliban) which may go against the interests of India and also nations which oppose the policies and actions of these two nations. For example: Pakistan and Bangladesh have a historical issues with the partition, The Present government of Maldives is opposed to China.
- **No Contiguity With Taliban:** Unlike Pakistan, China and Iran, India and other nations have no contiguity with Afghanistan. This may hurt any future strategies if the subcontinent wants to guard it against the rise of Taliban.
- **Organised crimes and Drugs :** Afghanistan is the part of golden crescent which is the largest producer of opium. The control of opium trade and its nexus with organised crime can destabilise the sub continent. India and other nations who have been trying to control drug abuse might face various hindrances.

Strategies which the Subcontinent could follow

- **Broader Diplomatic Engagement:** India and other subcontinent nations should consider appointing a special envoy dedicated to Afghanistan. The envoy can ensure that Indian views are expressed at every meeting, and broaden engagement with the Taliban.
- **Decoupling of Taliban-Pakistan:** Although Pakistan's leverage over the Taliban is real, it may not be absolute.
- **The Taliban is bound to seek a measure of autonomy from Pakistan.** India and other nations will have to wait a while before the current issues between India and the Taliban can be overcome.

- **Balancing the Opportunities in Afghanistan:** Structuring the internal balance of power within Afghanistan has always been hard. A deeper Sino-Pak partnership in Afghanistan will inevitably produce countervailing trends.
 - However, for a patient, open-minded and active India, there will be no dearth of balancing opportunities in Afghanistan.
 - **Leverage Indian Infrastructural Developments:** Indian USD 3 billion assistance to Afghanistan is in concrete projects that serve its population and have earned it their goodwill that will endure.
 - The need today is to not stop the development work in Afghanistan and continue the good work.
- **Global Cooperation:** There is a lot less global acceptance of terrorism today than in it was in the 1990s.
 - No Indian subcontinent power would like to see Afghanistan re-emerge as a global sanctuary of terror.
 - The world has also imposed significant new constraints on Pakistan's support for terror through mechanisms like the Financial Action Task Force.

Conclusion

The situation in Afghanistan is tense and still evolving. Given the historical circumstances of the rise of Taliban and consequent ramifications of terror and fundamentalism it would be prudent for the Indian subcontinent to invest more in intelligence, deradicalisation measures and international collaboration to stop terrorist funding. Further there is also a need for the whole block to come together on this issue and open negotiations with Taliban on these critical issues. This will be more pragmatic given the total control in Afghanistan which the Taliban might have in future.